

Attentive audience at David North's Sydney launch of *The Heritage We Defend*

Our reporter

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There was a warm and appreciative response last night when David North, the chairperson of the *World Socialist Web Site* International Editorial Board, spoke on the 80-year history of the Fourth International during the launching of the new edition of his book, *The Heritage We Defend*, at Gleebooks, a leading Sydney bookshop. The event was sponsored by Mehring Books, the publishing house of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

North outlined the immense relevance of this history for the worldwide eruption of struggles today, by the working class and young people, against war, social inequality, climate change and the re-emergence of fascist currents within the capitalist elites.

North, who has played a pivotal role in the international socialist movement for 45 years and is also the national chairperson of the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in the United States, participated in a probing conversation with Nick Beams, who has worked closely with North for decades as a central leader of the SEP in Australia. North then answered a series of thoughtful questions from the audience.

More than 70 people, including SEP members and supporters, and others keen to learn more about the history of the world movement founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, filled the upstairs room at Gleebooks. North later signed copies of his book for those who purchased it at the event.

During their on-stage conversation, Beams asked North to respond to those who contemptuously dismissed the Trotskyist movement's central concern with questions of theory and political principle. Revisionist tendencies claimed that the stabilisation of global capitalism after the horrors of two world wars had rendered the Fourth International's revolutionary

program redundant.

In response, North said it was striking, looking back 30 years to when the first edition of *The Heritage We Defend* was written, to see how many of the issues it examined were central to world politics today. Applying the historical materialist method of Marxism, he continued, enabled one to understand how serious political conflicts between individual figures within the Trotskyist movement reflected deeper class interests.

To explain this, North outlined the historical significance of Trotsky's founding of the Fourth International as the world party of socialist revolution, to resolve the crisis of working class leadership, produced by the monstrous betrayals of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and internationally during the 1920s and 1930s. Those betrayals, North said, later culminated in the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, vindicating Trotsky's warnings about the counter-revolutionary character of the regime.

Only the ICFI, North emphasised, based on Trotsky's analysis, had predicted the restoration of capitalism by the Stalinist regimes across Eastern Europe, China, Vietnam and the Soviet Union, and politically assessed and prepared for its consequences.

Referring to the current war tensions and political crises now wracking governments throughout the world, North said Trotsky's prognosis, in the founding program of the Fourth International, had been vindicated. The "death agony of capitalism" could be resolved only through a worldwide socialist revolution led by the working class, or a descent into war and barbarism, which would threaten human civilisation.

North particularly focussed on the vital political issues at stake in the struggles conducted since 1938 to defend Trotsky's analysis and program against various opportunist tendencies. In one form or another, these

tendencies had adapted to the surface appearance of events, during and after World War II, and written off the revolutionary role of the world working class.

North traced the political logic and material class interests that invariably led the opportunists to embrace the agenda of the imperialist powers and spawn the development of identity politics, based on gender, race and sexuality. At the heart of such politics was the rejection of the revolutionary capacities of the working class to overturn global capitalism.

In this context, the author explained that the new Preface to *The Heritage We Defend* dealt with the political positions of a current associated with the Partido Obrero in Argentina, which was currently seeking to collaborate with the country's bourgeois establishment. To justify such a reactionary agenda, this group claimed that the Fourth International was beset by a fatal flaw, almost from the outset, because it had failed to abandon Trotsky's revolutionary perspective during World War II and to re-orient toward a defence of bourgeois democracy.

The seriousness of the audience's response to the historical issues canvassed by North was expressed in the first question from the floor. The questioner asked North to elaborate on what he meant by referring to Marx and Engels' explanation of the need to examine the "motives behind the motives" of political figures. She asked how this related to "Donald Trump and his cohorts."

In reply, North said Trump was an expression of the desperate drive by the US ruling class, and that of other imperialist powers, to assert global hegemony over rival capitalist nation states and, above all, their intense fear of the resurgence of the working class. The source of the turn toward military conflict and fascistic forms of rule lay not in the minds of the individuals involved, but in deeper economic and social processes.

North will be speaking at public meetings in Sydney this Sunday, and in Melbourne and Wellington next week, on Eighty Years of the Fourth International (1938-2018): The class struggle, revolution and socialism in the 21st century.



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